

Photo by Jeri L. Curley



Crystal River Manatee Snorkel

For some of us, the day began well before dawn. With my trusted navigator, Dianne, by my side we headed for Crystal River. We arrived to a flurry of activity in the dive shop as 3 groups of Boy Scouts prepared for their manatee adventure. The weather was a bit nippy but the sky was clear and we headed toward Three Sisters Spring, wet suits on and feelings high. With our trusted “captain” at the helm (Thanks Brian!) we motored toward our destination. On the way, we were greeted by several families of manatee—



new borns, teens, moms... As we turned into the canal that led to the entrance to Three Sisters, we ran into a log jam of boats. There must have been 20 large pontoon boats stacked like cord wood along the canal. Now I know why the dive shop tried to steer us toward another spring as our first stop. We attempted to anchor along the shore but the muck threatened to pull Brian under the surface (and he’s at least 6 foot!). We snorkeled our way through the maze of boats to the “Manatee Only” zone that is roped off with a sign proclaiming a \$100K fine for any human entering this zone. Right Dianne!?

Well, the Boy Scouts had beaten us to the spring and the Manatees had retreated into the sanctuary. The water was stirred up and the manatees wanted peace! One by one the manatees would swim under us to head for the seagrass beds to feed. We decided to swim up the creek to the spring. When I say swim, I really mean pull yourself from rock to rock, against the current, avoiding the entering and exiting kayaks and manatees. A difficult task under normal circumstances, but I had my camera with two strobes! A mother and calf nearly rammed me on their way down the creek. But the swim was well worth it—except for the screaming Tweens! I was wedged along the bank of the creek for quite a while and the

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manatees swam by at a perfect distance for my camera to capture—though some were too fast! We swam back to the boat to quickly change the card in my camera and head back out. Of course the best laid plans...I couldn’t find the card I carefully placed in a safe spot. It was a beautiful day and I wish we could have stayed longer! After lunch at the newly remodeled restaurant, we headed back to Melbourne via Vero. —Jeri L. Curley



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